

Town Hall,
Whitesboro, Oneida Co. N. Y.

HABS No 501

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA.
District No. 5.

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

Historic American Buildings Survey
Norman R. Sturgis, District Officer.
353 Broadway Albany, N. Y.

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TOWN HALL
Park Avenue
Whitesboro, Oneida County
New York

Owner: Whitesboro.

Date of Erection: 1807.

Architect and Builder: No record.

Present Condition: Good.

Number of Stories: Two, and basement.

Materials of Construction: Brick and stucco.

Other Existing Records: See text.

Additional Data: See following pages.

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THE TOWN HALL AT WHITESBORO, N. Y.

The town of Whitestown*, in which is located the subject of this survey, played an important part in the early history of the State. Within the present limits of the township was fought the bloody Battle of Oriskany, considered by many to be the turning point of the American Revolution.

The town was founded as a part of Montgomery County by an act of the Legislature March 7th 1788, and its eastern boundary was fixed at a line which runs on the west side of what is now Genesee St., Utica, north and south to the state boundaries. Its other boundaries were, on the south, the Pennsylvania state line, and on the north and west, the limits of New York State. Within this territory, comprising an area of 12 million acres, were located four of the five nations of the Iroquois, the rich agricultural lands of western New York, the beautiful Finger Lake region and the Niagara Frontier.

The town being near the headwaters of the Mohawk River was truly the gateway to the West. In this advance to the west, Hugh White left his home in Connecticut in 1784, with his family, to take up land, and finding the country suitable for his purpose, purchased 1200 acres. He soon became a man of influence, due to his fair treatment of the Indians and settlers alike, and so when the township was founded it was given his name.

In the division of the vast territory of Montgomery County into other counties, Whitestown became the county seat of what was then Herkimer County which extended to the present Ontario County. Court was held in the school house on or near the site of the present town hall and Hugh White sat as one of the side judges. Oneida County which was subsequently founded, included what is now Oswego, Jefferson, Lewis and St Lawrence Counties, and Whitestown and Rome were both designated as county seats. On April 6th 1806, the supervisors authorized the construction of court houses at each place. Both buildings are supposed to have been very much alike, if not exactly, and were built of brick which was poled up the Mohawk River from Albany. The Rome Court House was burned in 1847, leaving the Whitestown building probably the oldest one in the state yet standing, built as a court house.

Hugh White donated the site of the court house along with a park to the county with the provision that if it ceased to be the county seat it should revert to his heirs. The neighboring city of Utica becoming the more important town, the county seat was moved there, but in 1860 Philo White, a grandson of the donor, gave the court house and park to the town of Whitestown

*Town is Whitesboro; Township is Whitestown.

-2-

to be used as a Town Hall and Council Chamber.

Two interesting bits of legal history were furnished by this town. In 1805 the Court of Errors held the first chancery case in the state on rights in a stream of water as affected by accupation and the unwritten agreements between the proprietors of adjacent lands. In 1809 this town gave the Supreme Court its first case on the law of escapes. The jail liberties here, which were free to imprisoned debtors, were so established that a certain sidewalk was within the liberty but a certain roadway was not. A person, strolling on a winter day, found this sidewalk encumbered with a snowdrift, and he stepped out into the roadway and walked there a few rods; and the sheriff being sued for this as an escape, was condemned to pay the creditor the whole judgment, being over \$5,000.00. As there were no precedents covering these cases in American law the arguments were made citing English law.

The above is compiled from: Descriptive Work on Oneida County, edited by Daniel E. Wager, the Boston History Co. Publishers, 1896. Whitestown Centennial Address by Hon. Chas. Tracy, June 1884. and Transactions Oneida County Historical Society.

David S. Dobson,
Author

Revised 1936, H.C.F.